Guide for Including and Accommodating English Language Learners (ELLs) in the Nebraska State Accountability (NeSA) Tests

2009-2010

Contents

I.   Who are English Language Learners?

According to the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)*, English language learners (ELLs) are those students who have a native language other than English, **OR** who come from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on their level of English proficiency**, AND** whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny the individual (i) the ability to meet the state's proficient level of achievement on state assessments, (ii) the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English, or, (iii) the opportunity to participate fully in society. (For full text of the definition, please see Public Law 107-110, Title IX, Part A, Sec. 9101, (25) of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*).

Each district with ELL students should have a written definition used for determining services and meeting Office of Civil Rights requirements.

Note: Foreign exchange students are NOT considered ELL students and should be included in the district assessment process.

II.   Inclusion of ELLs in Nebraska State Accountability (NeSA)

Both federal and state laws require the inclusion of all students in the local and state assessment process, including those students who are English language learners.

Under Title I of the ESEA, states must include Limited English Proficient (LEP) students, also known as ELLs, in their assessments of academic achievement in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science and must provide LEP students with appropriate accommodations including, to the extent practicable, assessments in the language most likely to yield accurate data on what LEP students know and can do in the academic content areas until they have achieved English language proficiency (U.S. Department of Education, Assessment and Accountability of Recently Arrived and Former Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students Non-Regulatory Guidance, 2007, p. 3).

- ELL students are expected to take the NeSA reading test with appropriate accommodations as outlined in this document.
  - The district may exempt a recently arrived LEP student from the NeSA reading test for one reporting period.
    - *Note: **Recently Arrived** LEP students are defined by the U.S. Department of Education as students with limited English proficiency who have attended schools in the United States for less than twelve months. The phrase "schools in the United States" includes only schools in the 50 States and the District of Columbia.*
  - For AYP purposes, recently arrived limited English proficient students are counted as having participated in the state's assessments for purposes of meeting the participation requirement if they take either an assessment of English language proficiency (ELDA) **OR** the reading test (NeSA-R) **AND** the mathematics assessment (STARS in 2010, NeSA-M in 2011).

- Recently arrived LEP students are required to take the NeSA writing test with appropriate accommodations. Writing scores are included in determining AYP in grades 4 and 8 as the other academic indicator.

- ELL students are expected to take state math and science assessments with appropriate accommodations as outlined in this document.

- Redesignated ELL students are allowed the use of accommodations on state assessments during the two-year monitoring period.

- All ELL Students, grades K-12 must take the English proficiency assessment. The English Language Development Assessment (ELDA) must be administered annually regardless of time in a U.S. school.
  - This document **does not** address accommodations for ELDA. Refer to the ELDA test administrator's manual for accommodations specific to ELDA.

III.   Test Administration Practices Available to All Students, Including ELLs

Test administration practices are changes or adjustments in test administration that are appropriate for all students. Providing test administration practices should not affect the construct being tested. They are available to all students who could benefit from them and are not considered accommodations.

Because some of the test administration practices are not specific to ELL students' linguistic needs, they are not listed as accommodations. Test administration practices should be consistently implemented within all schools in a district.

	Test Administration Practices (appropriate for all students)
I.	*Test Administration Practices – includes Nebraska State Accountability (NeSA) Reading, Writing, Mathematics, Science*
1.	Test administrator reads directions aloud for student and rereads as needed.
2.	Test administrator provides an audio recording of directions.
3.	Test administrator OR student highlights important information in test directions.
4.	Test administrator reads, simplifies, explains, or clarifies directions in English or native language.
5.	Test administrator provides oral or written directions in native language.
6.	Test administrator provides distraction-free space or alternate, supervised location for student (e.g., study carrel, front of room).
7.	Student rereads and/or restates directions in his/her own words.
8.	Student uses page marker (e.g., bookmark or straight edge) to maintain place.
9.	Student marks test booklet (e.g., highlight, annotate, or strike-through).
10.	Student reads aloud to self in quiet manner.
11.	Student takes test at home or in care facility (e.g., hospital) with district supervision.
12.	*These tools are available on the Computerized Assessment and Learning (CAL) online system. • Chooser – an arrow to mark an answer • Highlighter – a tool to highlight a passage or item • Mark for Review – a tool that turns items to yellow to be a reminder to return • Striker – a red line to cross out options • Pauses/Resume – a button to pause and begin again • Eraser -- a tool to erase the highlights or striker masks •Guideline – a tan bar to keep one's place when reading

IV.   Understanding Allowable Accommodations

What is an accommodation?

Testing accommodations are changes to testing procedures, testing materials, or the testing situation in order to allow the student meaningful participation in an assessment (Acosta, B., Rivera, C., Shafer Willner, L. and Staehr Fenner, D., 2008). Accommodations are one of the primary strategies for ensuring that ELLs who are included in state mathematics, science, writing, or reading assessments are more likely to be tested on their knowledge of the content rather than their English language proficiency.

Effective accommodations for ELLs address the unique linguistic and socio-cultural needs of the student and enable them to demonstrate knowledge of the content without altering the test construct. An accommodation is intended to minimize the cognitive resources needed by ELLs to process the language of the test so they can attend to the content.

Test Modifications

Test modifications are not the same as accommodations. Test modifications are adjustments or changes in the test or the testing process that change the test expectation, the grade level, or the construct or content being measured. **Modifications are not appropriate for state testing.**

Native Language Testing

Under ESEA, students may be assessed in their native language, if necessary, for three years with or without additional accommodations. After that time, all assessments must be conducted in English unless the school district determines, on a case-by-case basis, that assessments in the student's language would likely yield more accurate and reliable information for a period not to exceed two additional years.

NDE provides writing prompts in Spanish for grades 4, 8, and 11. Districts may translate the prompt into other languages if necessary. For NeSA writing responses in languages other than English or Spanish, answer documents should be returned to the writing scoring site. The student will be counted as a participant. It is important to consider background characteristics of students, particularly their literacy levels in the native language, when deciding if a translated prompt and native language response is appropriate.

Use of interpreters and translators

Districts must ensure that any interpreters and translators are qualified. The translator/interpreter should be highly proficient in both languages, be familiar with the assessment, and have training and /or experience in reading oral scripts of assessments so as to assure standard administration. Written translations should be developed by experienced translators who are knowledgeable of the content of the test.

Prior Use Requirement

The common rule that all accommodations should be routinely used in the classroom prior to the test does not always hold true for English Language Learners. While it is important to provide opportunities to use accommodations, such as reference materials (commercial dictionaries, bilingual word lists, customized glossaries) well before the test, it is not as important for the other accommodations such as oral English (read-alouds, audiotape/CDs/IPods, repetition, or clarification), oral translations, scribed response in either English/native language tests, or extended time. (Acosta et al., 2008) While many accommodations do not **require** prior experience, they may well be appropriate and helpful for instruction.

> Note: No testing materials will be provided for the purpose of recording/translation prior to the opening of the testing window. All recorded or written translations must be deleted or destroyed at the end of the testing window.

ELL Students in Special Education

For an ELL student who is also served by Special Education, refer to the accommodations listed on the Individualized Education Plan (IEP). It is important to consider accommodations recommended in this document when writing the student's IEP. The student could potentially benefit from Special Education accommodations as well as linguistic support accommodations. Each student's IEP team should determine appropriate accommodations.

Accommodations for English Language Learners are categorized in two ways:

- **Direct Linguistic Support Accommodations**
  - Involve adjustments to the text of the assessment with the intent of reducing the linguistic load necessary to access the content of the test.
  - Can be delivered in English or the native language.

- **Indirect Linguistic Support Accommodations**
  - Involve adjustments to the conditions under which a test is taken to allow ELLs to more efficiently use their linguistic resources.
  - Includes adjustments to test environment and/or test schedule.

V. Guidelines and Descriptions of Direct Linguistic Support and Indirect Linguistic Support Accommodations

Direct Linguistic Support with Test Directions

Test Administrator Reads Directions Aloud for Student and Rereads as Needed

The directions should be read by an education professional who regularly provides this accommodation to the students during classroom instruction, classroom assessments, and district assessments. When reading, the test administrator must be careful not to inadvertently give clues that indicate the correct answer or help eliminate some answer choices. The test administrator should use even inflection so that the student does not receive any cues by the way the information is read. Directions may be re-read as necessary.

Test Administrator Provides Oral or Written Directions in Native Language

The only difference between teacher read directions in English and teacher read directions in the native language is the student's native language. In the case of translation accommodations, students do not need to be consistently receiving them in the classroom.

Test Administrator Provides Translated Audio Recording of Directions in Native Language

Audio recordings should be read by a native (or near native) speaker who reads aloud with clear standard pronunciation and intonation patterns. The recorded version should be checked to verify that the script has been fully followed and that all the words are comprehensible. Students should be provided a written version of the translation to use during the oral presentation.

Test Administrator Simplifies, Explains, or Clarifies Directions in English or Native Language

Clarification in English is a category of accommodations that provide oral explanations of text considered potentially difficult for ELLs to understand. When clarified, text is expected to be more easily understood and manageable. Clarification is done in real time. Examples of clarification accommodations include "clarify/explain test directions in English" and "simplify test directions."

Direct Linguistic Support with Content and Test Items

Administrator Reads Content and Test Items to Student in English and Rereads as Needed (for NeSA reading test, this applies only to test items)

The content and test items should be read by an education professional who regularly provides this accommodation to the students in classroom instruction, on classroom assessments, and on district assessments. When reading, the test administrator must be careful not to inadvertently give clues that indicate the correct answer or help eliminate some answer choices. The test administrator should use even inflection so that the student does not receive any cues by the way the information is read. Test items may be re-read as necessary. **For the NeSA reading test, the content (reading passages) may not be read aloud to students. Test items (which are the question stem and answer choices) may be read aloud.**

Test Administrator Provides a Translator to Orally Translate Content and Test Items to Student in Native Language and Rereads as Needed (for NeSA reading test, this applies only to test items)

The translator should be highly proficient in both languages, be familiar with the assessment, and have training and /or experience in reading oral scripts of assessments so as to assure standard administration. Written translations should be developed by experienced translators who are knowledgeable of the content of the test. Test items may be re-read as necessary. **For the NeSA reading test, the content (reading passages) may not be read aloud to students. Test items (which are the question stem and answer choices) may be read aloud.**

> Note: No testing materials will be provided for the purpose of recording/translation prior to the opening of the testing window. All recorded or written translations must be deleted or destroyed at the end of the testing window.

Test Administrator Provides Translated Audio Recording of Content and Test Items in Native Language (for NeSA reading test, this applies only to test items)

Audio recordings should be read by a native (or near native) speaker who reads aloud with clear standard pronunciation and intonation patterns. The recorded version should be checked to verify that the script has been fully followed and that all the words are comprehensible. Students should be provided a written version of the translated test to use during the oral presentation. **For the NeSA reading test, the content (reading passages) may not be read aloud to students. Test items (which are the question stem and answer choices) may be read aloud.**

> Note: No testing materials will be provided for the purpose of recording/translation prior to the opening of the testing window. All recorded or written translations must be deleted or destroyed at the end of the testing window.

Test Administrator Provides a Translator to Translate Content and Test Items into Written Native Language (for NeSA reading test, this only applies to test items)

The translator should be highly proficient in both languages, be familiar with the assessment, and have training and /or experience in written translation of assessments so as to assure standard administration. Written translations should be developed by translators who are knowledgeable of the content of the test. **For the NeSA reading test, the content (reading passages) may not be translated for students. Test items (which are the question stem and answer choices) may be translated.**

> Note: No testing materials will be provided for the purpose of recording/translation prior to the opening of the testing window. All recorded or written translations must be deleted or destroyed at the end of the testing window.

Test Administrator Provides Bilingual Word List, Word-to-Word Translations, or Customized Glossary (not allowed on NeSA reading test)

- A bilingual word list is a district-developed list of key words in both English and the native language. Words included on the list should give the student access to the general test content but does not include key words that would compromise the construct being tested.

- A word-to-word translation (dictionary) does not have definitions of words. The use of word-to-word dictionaries should be a part of the student's regular classroom experience if being used as an accommodation for assessment.
- A customized glossary refers to a glossary that has been altered or compiled for a given context/content. English glossaries are specialized lists of words with definitions or explanations customized to fit the perceived needs of the test taker. Glossaries may use simplified English. Words and definitions included in the glossary should give the student access to the general test content but should not include key words that would compromise the construct of the test.

> *Note:* Commercial dictionaries that include explanations, definitions, pictures, or examples of terminology may be used for NeSA writing. Commercial dictionaries are not allowed for NeSA reading, mathematics, or science.

Student Responds Orally in Native Language—Translator Records Student Responses into Online System or Regular Test Booklet in English (not allowed on NeSA writing test)

- Allow students to respond **orally** in native language, translate response to English, test administrator records student response in English.

> Note: Students may respond orally in their native language, responses must be written exactly as they are spoken, translated to English and transcribed into another booklet or the online system. The person responsible for translating should be fluent in both English and the native language in all four language domains—reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Student Responds to NeSA Writing Prompt in Native Language

NDE provides writing prompts in Spanish for grades 4, 8, and 11. Districts may translate the prompt into other languages if necessary. For NeSA writing responses in languages other than English or Spanish, answer documents should be returned to the writing scoring site. The student will be counted as a participant. It is important to consider background characteristics of students, particularly their literacy levels in the native language, when deciding if a translated prompt and/or native language response is appropriate.

Indirect Linguistic Support Accommodations

Test Administrator Provides Extra Time for the NeSA Writing Test.

NeSA tests are untimed with the exception of the state writing test. ELL students may have additional time for completing the NeSA writing test. Adequate time for ELL students is an important accommodation as they may require more time to process the language of the assessment.

VI.   Selecting Appropriate Accommodations Based on Student Characteristics

Selecting the appropriate accommodation for an ELL student requires the examination of several background characteristics, if available:

- Level of oral language proficiency in English and the native language
  - Refer to the student's English proficiency level (ELP) score in listening and speaking on the ELDA or other language proficiency assessments.

- Literacy levels in English and the native language
  - Consider the student's current academic achievement and test performance in the content areas.
    - Attaining academic English and content vocabulary is a major factor in the assessment of content knowledge.
  - Determine the student's level of literacy in English.
    - Refer to the student's English language proficiency (ELP) score in reading and writing on the ELDA or other language proficiency assessments.
  - Determine the student's level of literacy in the native language.
    - If possible, find out how well student reads and writes in the native language.
  - Consider whether the student's oral proficiency in English or the native language is stronger than the student's written proficiency in either language.
    - This is an important consideration when selecting the accommodation that will yield the most accurate assessment of the student's knowledge of content.

- Language of instruction in the student's current/past schooling
  - Determine the language(s) in which the student has received academic instruction; one language may be stronger than the other.
  - Consider that a beginning student literate in a non-alphabetic script such as Chinese may benefit from oral response accommodations.

- Years of formal schooling
  - Find out if the student's schooling has been interrupted.
    - A student with interrupted formal education may have low literacy skills in both native language and English; oral accommodations may be more useful than written.
    - Highly mobile students may have gaps in their education.

- Age/grade level
  - If the student is younger (early elementary), oral accommodations may be more appropriate as students at this age are less likely to have developed strong literacy skills in either English or the native language.
  - If the student is older and requires accommodations that would set him/her apart from peers, consider selecting an appropriate test administration practice such as testing in a separate supervised location.

Students at Beginning Language Levels

ELLs at the lowest levels of English language proficiency tend to experience the greatest need for accommodations on tests, but these students are the least able to use them. Oral native language accommodations are considered to be the most useful for beginning language students, particularly those with fewer literacy skills. Written translations may be helpful for students literate in their native language. Reading the test aloud in English is helpful to beginners when accommodations in native language are not available. Although the NeSA reading, mathematics, and science tests are not timed, providing extended time is recommended for ELLs of all language levels.

Students at Intermediate Language Levels

Because ELLs at the intermediate level of English proficiency have usually developed some literacy in English, they may benefit from more accommodations. Having the test read aloud (with the exception of NeSA reading content), providing appropriate reference materials, and extending the time are usually helpful for intermediate students. Some students may benefit from native language testing. It is important to consider their literacy level in the native language, as well as their academic vocabulary knowledge in both languages when deciding if this accommodation is appropriate. Students who have received recent instruction in English, particularly those at the intermediate and advanced levels may be more likely to benefit from accommodations in English.

Students at Advanced Language Levels

The need for accommodations tends to decrease for students at the advanced level. Providing bilingual reference materials is recommended for students literate in the native language and who have academic vocabulary in native language and/or English. These students would typically not need oral translation. Advanced students may benefit from extended time.

Please refer to Sections IV, V, and VII for more information on allowable accommodations.

VII. NeSA Approved Accommodations Chart

Test Accommodations for English Language Learners (includes NeSA reading, writing, mathematics, science)	Language Levels			When would this accommodation be appropriate?
	Beginning (ELDA 1-2)	Intermediate (ELDA 3)	Advanced (ELDA 4-5)	
Direct Linguistic Support with Test Directions				
Test administrator reads directions aloud in English and rereads as needed.	●	●		Oral directions are helpful for students who may be more proficient in listening than they are in reading. Beginners may also benefit when native language is not available.
Test administrator reads directions aloud in native language and rereads as needed.	●			This accommodation is particularly helpful for beginning students who have not acquired enough English to understand oral or written English.
Test administrator provides written directions in native language.	●			A student who is literate in his/her native language may benefit from written directions in the native language.
Test administrator provides translated audio recording of directions in native language.				
Test administrator simplifies, explains, or clarifies directions in English or native language.	●	●		Beginning and intermediate students benefit from clarification. Beginners may particularly benefit when it is in their native language.
Direct Linguistic Support with Content and Test Items				
Test administrator reads content and test items to student in English and rereads as needed (for NeSA reading test, only test items may be read).	●			This accommodation is helpful for students who are more proficient in listening and speaking than they are in reading. Using this accommodation can help assess knowledge of content rather than reading ability.
Test administrator provides a translator to orally translate content and test items in native language and rereads as needed (for NeSA reading test, this applies only to test items).				This accommodation is helpful to beginning and intermediate students who are not literate in their native language, however, their native language oral skills are more developed.
Test administrator provides translated audio recording (e.g. audiotape/CD/IPod) of content and test items in native language (for NeSA reading test, this only applies only to test items).				
Test administrator provides a translator to translate content and test items into written native language (for NeSA reading test, this applies only to test items).				This accommodation is appropriate for students who are literate in native language and understand the academic vocabulary in that language. These students have usually had comparable formal schooling in home country.
Test administrator provides bilingual word list, word-to-word translations, or customized glossary (not allowed on NeSA reading test). Commercial dictionaries may only be used on NeSA writing.		●	●	Reference materials are appropriate for students who have had prior experience using them and are able to effectively access the information.
Student responds orally in his/her native language. A translator records student responses into online system or regular test booklet in English (not allowed on NeSA writing test).				This accommodation is used when the native language is the student's stronger academic language.
Student responds to NeSA writing prompt in native language. (NDE provides writing prompts in Spanish for grades 4, 8, and 11.)				Beginning students who are literate in their native language at grade level would likely benefit from this accommodation.
Indirect Linguistic Support				
Test administrator provides extra time for NeSA writing test. (Other NeSA tests are untimed.)	●	●	●	All levels may benefit from extending the time limits of a test to facilitate the additional processing time an ELL student needs to take an assessment in English.

● Recommended for ELLs at this English language proficiency level. The other accommodations listed may be helpful, based on individual student needs.

Important Information
- Districts may exempt a recently arrived limited English proficient student from the NeSA reading assessment for 12 months or one reporting period. A district must administer the state mathematics, science, and writing tests to recently arrived limited English proficient students.
- For NeSA, testing in native language is allowable for up to three years.
- For NeSA writing responses in languages other than English or Spanish, answer documents should be returned to the writing scoring site. The student will be counted as a participant.
- No testing materials will be provided for the purpose of recording/translation prior to the opening of the testing window. All recorded/written translations must be deleted/destroyed at the end of the testing window.

VIII.   Making Decisions as a Team

Decisions should be made by the school team responsible for planning the student's academic program and should be shared with the student's parents or guardians. Decisions about accommodations should not be made by an individual. The role of the team is to discuss the student's needs and the accommodations that may help the student for state testing, and decide which accommodations will be used by the student. It is good practice to document the accommodations used to aid decision-making in future years.

Members of the Accommodation Decision Making Team might include:

- ELL teacher
- General education teachers
- School administrators
- School/district test coordinators
- The student (as appropriate)

The team should use the following ELL-responsive criteria to match accommodations to student needs:

- Level of oral language proficiency in English and the native language.
- Literacy levels in English and the native language.
- Language of instruction of the student's current/past schooling.
- Years of formal schooling and/or interruptions in schooling.
- Age/grade level.

Guiding questions to consider when determining accommodations:

1. What support does this individual student need to be able to show what he/she really knows?
2. Will the testing accommodation be implemented appropriately so that the construct of the test is not compromised?
3. Has the student had prior experience using this accommodation? (Keep in mind that some accommodations are appropriate to use without prior experience.)

Do's and Don'ts When Selecting Accommodations

Do…make accommodation decisions based on individual language proficiency levels.	**Don't…** make blanket accommodations for groups of students.
Do…select accommodations that provide linguistic support so students can gain access to the content.	**Don't**…make ELL accommodations decisions based on a special education framework.
Do…be sure to note on the answer document that an accommodation on the approved list is being used.	**Don't**…use an accommodation that is not on the approved list.
Do…become familiar with the types of approved accommodations that can be used for assessment and select wisely.	**Don't**…use most or all the accommodations on the approved list simply to be "safe."
Do…select accommodations based on specific individual needs for each content area.	**Don't**…assume certain accommodations are appropriate for every student in every content area.
Do… document accommodations for future reference.	**Don't…** assume the same accommodations remain appropriate year after year.
Do…consider a student's age, prior schooling experiences, and literacy level in the native language when deciding accommodations.	**Don't…** assume that all ELLs are literate in their native language.
Do…get input about accommodations from key teachers, administrators, and students (when appropriate), and use it to make decisions.	**Don't**…make decisions about assessment accommodations alone. A team approach is best.

Additional Resources

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